

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An online support method that gives online support to eliminate a problem arising in a device, said online support method comprising the steps of:

5 (a) providing a user of the device with a specific form that enables the user to input and transmit information with regard to the problem; and

(b) providing the user of the device with support information, which is prepared in advance for elimination of the problem, prior to said step (a).

10 2. An online support method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said step (b) provides the support information in response to each selecting instruction given by the user.

15 3. An online support method in accordance with claim 1, wherein the specific form also asks the user to input information regarding the individual user.

20 4. An online support method in accordance with claim 1, wherein the specific form also asks the user to input information regarding a operation carried out by the user to eliminate the problem.

25 5. An online support method in accordance with claim 1, wherein the specific form asks the user to input information regarding a user's browsing record of the support information provided in advance.

30 6. An online support method in accordance with claim 1, wherein the specific form comprises a first part that asks the user to input specific information, which is generally required for analysis of the problem, and a second part that enables the user to input arbitrary information with regard to the problem.

7. An online support method in accordance with claim 6, said online support method further comprising the step of:

(c) obtaining browsing record information, which represents a user's
5 browsing record of the support information, in addition to the information input in the specific form.

8. An online support method in accordance with claim 6, wherein the
10 information includes first information required to identify the device and second information required to specify a working status of the device.

9. An online support method in accordance with claim 8, wherein the
first information required to identify the device includes at least one of a
model name of the device, an ID number allocated to the individual device,
15 information that identifies a driver program for driving the device, and information that identifies an operating system on which the driver program runs.

10. An online support method in accordance with claim 8, wherein
20 the second information required to specify the working status of the device includes at least one of information that identifies an application program activated on the device when the problem arises, information that identifies an application program used for driving the device and specifies data transmitted to the device, and information that specifies a communication
25 environment of the device.

11. An online support method in accordance with claim 8, wherein
the device comprises a storage unit in which specific information
representing the working status of the device is stored, and the second
30 information required to specify the working status of the device comprises

information that allows an access to the storage unit.

12. An online support method in accordance with claim 6, wherein the specific form also asks the user to input information regarding the individual user.

13. An online support method in accordance with claim 6, wherein the specific form also asks the user to input information regarding a operation carried out by the user to eliminate the problem.

14. An online support method in accordance with claim 6, wherein the specific form asks the user to input information regarding a user's browsing record of the support information provided in advance.

15. An online support method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said step (a) enables the specific form to be offered to the user without said step (b), in response to an instruction given by the user.

16. An online support method that gives online support to eliminate a problem arising in a device, said online support method comprising the step of:

providing a user of the device with a specific form that enables the user to input and transmit information with regard to the problem, wherein the specific form comprises a first part that asks the user to input specific information, which is generally required for analysis of the problem, and a second part that enables the user to input arbitrary information with regard to the problem.

17. An online support method in accordance with claim 16, wherein the information includes first information required to identify the device and

second information required to specify a working status of the device.

18. An online support method in accordance with claim 17, wherein the first information required to identify the device includes at least one of a
5 model name of the device, an ID number allocated to the individual device, information that identifies a driver program for driving the device, and information that identifies an operating system on which the driver program runs.

10 19. An online support method in accordance with claim 17, wherein the second information required to specify the working status of the device includes at least one of information that identifies an application program activated on the device when the problem arises, information that identifies an application program used for driving the device and specifies data
15 transmitted to the device, and information that specifies a communication environment of the device.

20 20. An online support method in accordance with claim 17, wherein the device comprises a storage unit in which specific information representing the working status of the device is stored, and the second information required to specify the working status of the device comprises information that allows an access to the storage unit.

21. An online support method in accordance with claim 16, wherein
25 the specific form also asks the user to input information regarding the individual user.

22. An online support method in accordance with claim 16, wherein the specific form also asks the user to input information regarding a
30 operation carried out by the user to eliminate the problem.

23. An online support method in accordance with claim 16, wherein the specific form asks the user to input information regarding a user's browsing record of the support information provided in advance.

24. An online support method in accordance with claim 16, wherein the device carries out either of processing and generation of digital data, and the specific form asks the user to input at least information that is required to specify a result of either of the processing and the generation carried out by the device.

25. An online support method in accordance with claim 24, wherein the device inputs either of image data and audio data, and the information is either of the image data and the audio data input into the device.

26. An online support method in accordance with claim 24, wherein the device outputs either of an image and audio based on digital data, and the information represents electronic data representing either of the image and the audio output by the device.

27. An online support method in accordance with claim 1, wherein the information includes first information required to identify the device and second information required to specify a working status of the device.

28. An online support method in accordance with claim 27, wherein the first information required to identify the device includes at least one of a model name of the device, an ID number allocated to the individual device, information that identifies a driver program for driving the device, and information that identifies an operating system on which the driver program runs.

29. An online support method in accordance with claim 27, wherein the second information required to specify the working status of the device includes at least one of information that identifies an application program activated on the device when the problem arises, information that identifies an application program used for driving the device and specifies data transmitted to the device, and information that specifies a communication environment of the device.

30. An online support method in accordance with claim 27, wherein the device comprises a storage unit in which specific information representing the working status of the device is stored, and the second information required to specify the working status of the device comprises information that allows an access to the storage unit.

31. An online support method in accordance with claim 27, wherein the specific form also asks the user to input information regarding the individual user.

32. An online support system that gives information to a client and thereby carries out online support to eliminate a problem arising in a device of the client, said online support system comprising:

a transmission form providing unit that provides the client with a specific form that enables the client to input and transmit information with regard to the problem; and

a link providing unit that provides the client with a link to said transmission form display unit in a predetermined page that allows an access to support information prepared in advance for elimination of the problem.

33. An online support system that gives information to a client and

thereby carries out online support to eliminate a problem arising in a device of the client, said online support system comprising:

a transmission form providing unit that provides the client with a specific form that enables the client to input and transmit information with regard to the problem, wherein the specific form comprises a first part that asks the client to input specific information, which is generally required for analysis of the problem, and a second part that enables the client to input arbitrary information with regard to the problem.

34. A client that gains online support from a predetermined support server to eliminate a problem arising in a device of the client, said client comprising:

a support information display unit that receives support information, which is prepared in advance, from the predetermined support server and displays the input support information;

a browsing information registration unit that registers a browsing record of the support information as browsing information; and

a transmission unit that transmits data required for a further support, which comprises arbitrary information with regard to the problem and the browsing information, to the predetermined support server.

35. A client that gains online support from a predetermined support server to eliminate a problem arising in a device of the client, said client comprising:

a processed result storage unit that stores processed result information, which is required to specify a result of either of processing and generation carried out by the device; and

a transmission unit that transmits data required for a further support, which comprises arbitrary information with regard to the problem and the processed result information, to the predetermined support server.

36. A client in accordance with claim 35, wherein the device inputs either of image data and audio data, and the processed result information is either of the image data and the audio data input into the device.

5

37. A client in accordance with claim 35, wherein the device outputs either of an image and audio based on digital data, and the processed result information is electronic data representing either of the image and the audio output by the device.

10

38. A recording medium in which a program is recorded, wherein said program functions to drive a device and causes a link to an upper-layered online support Web page, which does not depend upon a model of the device nor a problem, out of support Web pages that provide a client with support information to eliminate a problem arising in the device, to be shown in at least one of a setting window that allows a user of the device to specify settings of the device and a display window that displays a working status of the device.

15